

Issue 01 – Anna Reading

SOS / Sculptors on Sculpture is a series of weekly condensed interviews with young contemporary sculptors.

London-based artist Anna Reading works in sculpture, drawing, performance and text, creating highly tactile and fragmented environments. Combining layers of surplus commodity materials, including; shredded foam, gravel, oyster shells, chip forks and cardboard, her work addresses the absurd relationship between the organic and the synthetic.

SOS: This series of interviews originated from the Covid19 lockdown and finding new ways of supporting each other. How have you adapted to the lockdown? Are you able to make work at this time?

AR: It's an incredibly difficult adjustment. I was never very good at staying in the house at the best of times. I felt a lot of losses, one after the other, and there is an overwhelming anxiety that more will come. It was also such a challenge to prepare for, how could anyone tell what they might need for an indefinite amount of time. I managed to get a small amount of materials, my beloved jigsaw and my drawings from the studio. I also brought a wall relief piece I was working on home to finish.

Honestly, at the time I thought I was being over cautious, but now I wish I brought more. So far, I have been drawing the lamps in my house. Observational drawing is bringing me focus. The studio was an extension of my thought process and so I need to build that up again. I also finished the piece I brought home and doing some making made me feel much better. The next step is to start making some new smaller sculptures and collages. I'm just trying to reorganise my headspace first.



'The Brink', 2019, wood, foam, gravel, gloss paint, PVA, Jesmonite, chip forks, staples, wire, 150 x 300 x 60cm

SOS: How important is it to you for your work to be visible? To be out in the world and interacted with?

AR: Very much. Sculpture should take up space like a belligerent toddler. My work is tactile and clearly made by hand, which is a kind of performativity and is my way of connecting with the viewer. I really want them to know that someone made it, like when you find a sandcastle on the beach. I like the remnants of activity. I often think my work is landscape based, forming an environment that a viewer can explore.

SOS: You craft your work from found materials such as cardboard, shells and wire. What part does the vulnerability of the materials play in things?

AR: Well I suppose the materials are often brittle, crumbly and unstable. This contributes to how the work feels; energetic, vulnerable and precarious. The materials come out of exploration in the studio, often from mistakes, where I have

SOS: London is becoming an increasingly inhospitable place for artists to make work, particularly sculpture. Do you see yourself as very much a London-based artist or are you toying with the idea of pastures new?

AR: I am deeply rooted to London through people who I love, and it is where I have built my community. This period of isolation is reminding me about art's therapeutic benefits, but in terms



tried to use materials one way, but resulted in discovering something completely new. I tend to go with materials that catch my eye and feel right, rather than because they are conceptually driven, because my work is lead by emotion. This way, I discover concepts present in the work through making. My recent work with oyster shells formed an unexpected link when I discovered they were surplus material from pearl farms. This opened up new questions of the blurred boundary between what could be a synthetic or organic material.

Installation view of 'The Pothole' installed at Cross Lane Projects, Kendal 2019.

of a wider contribution to culture, I do not work alone. London is not conducive to making sculpture and certainly limits possibilities, but perhaps this challenge also adds to the work. I would love more space and time to make, but for now, I'm staying put. London has amazing resources for makers. Just before the lockdown I was about to begin a residency at Orbis Conservation, working with the skilled team there

to develop new material techniques. It's been postponed for now, but access to resources like that are what London does best.

SOS: Your exhibitions are often punctuated by performative acts. I'm intrigued to hear about the performative side of your practice, how does it feed into your sculptural work?

AR: The performances began as a way to enact and engage with my sculptures. In 2016 I wrote an ode to a sculpture made from airplane upholstery fabric and performed it to it dressed as a dismembered airplane seat. It was called *The Nightmare of the Grounded Pilot* and from there spoken word became a way to interact with my sculptures. More recently I performed a piece called *Forward Backward Awkward* which involves a sculpture that involves a sculpture that



'Super Soaker', 2020, Wood, plaster, card, shells, gloss paint, putty, 28 x 98 x 12cm

is based on a limpet shell, but also looks somewhat like the cage from the game *Mouse Trap*. I enter the sculpture wearing yellow waterproofs and slowly crawled through the space of my exhibition *The Pothole*. The idea came from a visit from an artist friend, Eom Jeongwon. She had come to visit from Korea and I was in the middle of some woodwork. I said I'd just be ten minutes and she started laughing saying 'you are always working'. I felt bad and I thought about it afterwards. I thought that it would be telling if I was still working at the opening of the show, slowly, repetitively and painfully. In the end entering the sculpture actually made me feel safe, maybe working is a place I retreat to.

Guest Question: David Sylvester's 'The London Recordings' in conversation with Rachel Whiteread in 1999. 'I'd like to ask you what art by others has especially interested you?'



'Look After Me I'll Look After You',
Wood, card, screws, foam, gravel,
PVA, light fitting, LED bulb, motor,
gloss, 107 x 54 x 54cm

AR: I absolutely love the work of Huma Bhabha. She makes monstrous figurative sculptures which seem to come from both ancient history and the far future. They are uniquely sci-fi and are constructed from found materials like polystyrene, rubber, paper, wire, and air-dried clay. I love the energy and tension held in their materiality. The first one I saw was *Man of No Importance*, which is in the Tate collection. It has a haunting presence, and seems messenger-like. I don't know, it feels connected to the earth or something, connected to the right now but also the past and future. There is also a fascinating lecture by her on YouTube for SIACs Visiting Artist Programme that I highly recommend.



Fused pottery shards from the wreck of a trade ship thought to be a Chinese junk, dating to approximately 1725. V&A Collection.



'Man of No Importance', 2006, Huma Bhabha. Tate Collection.

SOS: What's filling your time right now? Is there anything you're reading, watching or listening to that you would recommend?

AR: Hahaha, I mean mostly I've been catching up on *Sex Education* episodes, which is really therapeutic. Recently though I got a book called *Aquatopia* which is a kind of extended catalogue to an exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary. It's full of artworks, poems, essays, literature and objects which explore the mystery of the ocean. There is an amazing photo in there of some pottery shards which got fused together when the ship they were on caught on fire in 1725. The ship sunk and coral grew on the shards. As an object they are exactly the sense I want my own work to have; a kind of accidental synthesis and kinship of materials.

Interviewer: Josh Wright

